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STATE FOR ACTING DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FORE  
AND ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL -MILITARY  
AFFAIRS MULL FROM THE AMBASSADOR  
STATE ALSO FOR NEA/FO (WELCH AND GRAY), NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND  
HOPKINS), NEA/RA AND PM  
DOD FOR OSD (WHELAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/04/2017

TAGS: [MASS](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN MILITARY'S URGENT NEED FOR US SUPPORT

REF: A. TUNIS 787

[1](#)B. TUNIS 698

[1](#)C. TUNIS 619

[1](#)D. EMBASSY TUNIS FY09 MISSION STRATEGIC PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (S) In May, I conveyed the disappointment of the Tunis Country Team with the proposed cuts in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funding for Tunisia in Fiscal Year 2008 (Ref C). Tunisia is facing an unprecedented regional terrorist threat, particularly from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). There is growing evidence that Tunisia, a moderate Arab nation, may be a high-priority target for AQIM and other terrorist groups. The urgency of the situation has only increased recently as the Tunisian military continues to stretch its human and material resources to the limits in support of its border surveillance activities. As Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane told CODEL Tanner (Ref B), past FMF cuts were disappointing; this year the need is urgent. Given developments in recent weeks, I wanted to provide you with additional information to support the Country Team's strong recommendation for additional FMF assistance for Tunisia in FY-09.

[1](#)2. (S) During recent bilateral Joint Military Commission meetings, the Tunisian Army reported that terrorist activities along the Tunisian border with Algeria have risen sharply in 2007 (Ref A). In response, the Tunisian Armed Forces are applying a new, integrated counterterrorism approach along the country's borders with Algeria and Libya. More than 9,000 soldiers are deployed along almost nine hundred miles of terrain at any given moment, an effort that burdens nearly fifty percent of Tunisian Army personnel. These efforts have been successful to date, but have stretched the military to its limits and are not sustainable. If the Tunisian military cannot control the country's borders, regional terrorist entities are certainly poised to exploit those weaknesses.

[1](#)3. (C) The Tunisian military is making every effort to combat regional terrorism; US Foreign Military Financing may mean the difference between success and failure. The capital budget of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) is limited to less than 0.26 percent of Tunisia's Gross Domestic Product, reflecting Tunisia's emphasis on economic and social development programs. The MOD is allocated only 40 million Tunisian Dinars (approximately US \$35 million) annually to sustain all of its military equipment and fund new

acquisitions. Less than \$10 million of this is earmarked for the support and upgrading of US equipment, when the MOD estimates more than US \$47 million is required (\$28 million for maintenance; \$8 million for parts; \$9 million for upgrades). We believe these estimates are reasonable, and the significant shortfall is what we hope to address in the request for \$30 million in FY-09 FMF assistance for Tunisia (Ref D). I must stress that this FMF request is not to upgrade the GOT's current equipment, it is simply the minimum required to continue to operate aging US-origin items.

14. (S) Continued cuts to Tunisia's FMF directly affects the Tunisian military's ability to continue its counterterrorism efforts. North Africa, including Tunisia, is a focus of the War on Terror. Tunisia's need is urgent and the threat is real. The Tunisian military is capable and willing to contribute to broader US counterterrorism priorities in the region, but needs our support. As the FY-09 Foreign Assistance budget process proceeds, I again urge the Department to support Post's recommendation of \$30 million in FMF for Tunisia.

GODEC